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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 2778
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 0987
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 1106
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SUBJECT: FRENCH RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON WESTERN SAHARA
POLICY

REF: A. (A) STATE 33088

[1](#)B. (B) KAILU-JORDAN MARCH 28 E-MAIL

Classified By: Political Minister counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The French generally reacted favorably to reftel message on Western Sahara in meetings we held with the French Presidency and the MFA April 1 and 2. The key first priority seems to be engaging UNSYG Personal Envoy Peter van Walsum and other key Secretariat officials to encourage reference to autonomy as the most "realistic" basis for negotiations, and the MFA said it was instructing the French mission in New York to do so. Current indications are that a French statement would express a preference for an autonomy-based solution, insist that any settlement had to have full agreement by the parties concerned, and affirm respect for the principle of self-determination (though not necessarily via the holding of a referendum). France also favors a 12-month extension of MINURSO's mandate. The MFA and Elysee further agree in principle on consultations with the Friends of the western Sahara, albeit with differing perceptions of where the Spanish currently are on Western Sahara. The MFA understands the need to coordinate closely on our statements, including how we each deal with the Moroccans. A clear message from our French interlocutors is that we must be ready for a strong negative Algerian (and Polisario) reaction to what we are contemplating. End summary

[1](#)2. (S) We delivered ref a points on Western Sahara to French MFA DAS-equivalent for North Africa Nathalie Loiseau on April 2. Loiseau, who was aware of NEA A/S Welch's March 28 phone call to his French counterpart Jean Felix-Paganon (ref b) and our preview of the demarche to French Presidency NEA adviser Boris Boillon (see below), provided the following response, which she said had been coordinated with the MFA's IO bureau-equivalent:

--France agrees that it would be useful to say something along the lines we suggested at the end of April, i.e., following MINURSO's renewal. Failing to do so could risk losing the "dynamic" in the UNSC that has sustained its slight "tilt" in favor of Morocco's autonomy plan as the basis for a negotiated settlement of the Western Sahara dispute. (Comment: This has been Loiseau's longstanding and consistent message to us over the past few months. End comment)

--France also shares our overall analysis of the current situation in terms of the deadlock in Manhasset, the unlikelihood of any immediate breakthrough, and our view that an independent Western Sahara state is not "realistic."

--France will encourage UNSYG Personal envoy Peter van Walsum to write a report "in which he says what he believes," or at least more than he has been willing to do in the past. The MFA will instruct the French mission to talk to him as well as those members of the UNSYG's staff that it believes would be most influential on this issue. (Comment: Loiseau said that the mission would have to identify the relevant Secretariat officials. She said the GOF would welcome any

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discussion between our missions as to whom best to target for these efforts. End comment)

--It is important that the impending report on Western Sahara state clearly that the UN "is favorable" to some form of autonomy as the basis for a solution.

--Although Loiseau could not say definitively what a French public declaration would say, she stated that current ideas are that it would (1) express a preference for Morocco's autonomy plan as the basis for negotiations, (2) declare that any final outcome could only be decided by the parties concerned, and (3) affirm that a final resolution of the Western Sahara conflict must respect the principle of self-determination. (Comment: Loiseau's implied message was that such a statement would be easier to make following a UN report to the Council favoring negotiations on the basis of autonomy. She also mentioned that France may qualify what it says about respecting the principle of self-determination to make clear that it did not believe organizing a referendum

was the only to accomplish this. End comment)

--France agrees that a 12-month mandate would be preferable to the standard six-month term for the reasons we cited.

13. (S) Expanding a bit on the subject of a referendum, Loiseau said that France is not against the organizing of a vote strictly on the basis of approving or disapproving an autonomy-based settlement, i.e., that did not include independence as an option. This would mean that a no vote on autonomy would mean that the parties would return to square one to find a solution. We encouraged Loiseau to instruct the French mission in New York to raise this and associated points relating to the French legal understanding of the principle of self-determination with our mission at the expert's level. She agreed that this would be a good idea to ensure we were on the same wavelength on this particular point.

14. (S) With regard to consultations with other Friends of the Western Sahara (Friends), Loiseau posed no objection to our doing so with the British (although she asked for an indication of their reaction once we had it). She said she would reflect on discussions with others, particularly the Spanish. The French have found the Spanish difficult to pin down on Western Sahara, irrespective of the political party in power, but the fact that parliamentary elections just occurred in Spain could make it easier to bring the Spanish on board. She repeated the oft-expressed fact that, for Spain alone among the Friends, the Western Sahara remains a potent domestic political issue.

15. (S) Loiseau readily agreed that we need to share information on our contacts with the parties involved. With respect to the Moroccans, she concurred that once they sense what we are contemplating, they may try to play Paris and Washington against each other in an attempt to force one of us to express unequivocally a settlement on Morocco's terms. The French have not so far told the Moroccans anything about their intentions related to the MINURSO rollover. As for the Polisario, Loiseau said that she had recently met the newly

appointed representative to Paris (whom she named as "Ahmed Mansour"). By contrast with his predecessor, he was extremely hard line and inflexible. This seemed to confirm Loiseau's view that the Polisario's last congress had led to a significant toughening of its position on a negotiated settlement outside the previously agreed Baker plans. Indeed, when Loiseau previewed the French line favoring a referendum with a straight yes/no vote on autonomy, he declared any such proposal a complete non-starter and the Sahrawi people adamantly against any autonomy-based solution.

¶16. (S) Regarding Algeria, Loiseau repeated that the Algerians have expressed "disappointment" over the French position on Western Sahara since President Sarkozy's election. They had hoped, with Chirac's departure, that France's strong pro-Moroccan stance would soften, with implications for Western Sahara. The few discussions of Western Sahara the French have had with Algeria since last summer, and Sarkozy's public comments, have disabused the Algerians of any such notions. She expected that Western Sahara would figure in President Bouteflika's expected reelection campaign, with various politicians using French (and U.S.) backing of Morocco's position for their electoral purposes. Indeed, Loiseau emphasized the importance of not underestimating the blowback from the Algerians in response to French and U.S. statements along the lines we envisage. Kosovo, she concluded, is very much on their minds. She claimed that the Algerians used a recent visit by the Serbian foreign minister to assert their opposition to Kosovo's independence. Loiseau agreed that this paradoxical Algerian denial of the right of self-determination may be a tactical ploy to ensure strong Russian support of its Western Sahara equities in the UNSC.

¶17. (S) In addition to delivering the message to the MFA, we used an April 1 meeting at the Elysee with Boris Boillon (mostly devoted to Lebanon, per septel) to preview the points we would make to Loiseau. His reaction largely foreshadowed Loiseau's, although he was more cautious in terms of French readiness to issue a statement as we proposed. (Comment: We

interpret that more as reflecting the fact that Boillon had not yet conferred with the MFA than Elysee hesitation on the general idea. End comment) France agreed that the Manhasset process was bogged down, but we needed to anticipate a strongly negative Algerian reaction. We should not be naive, therefore, and per the last point in our demarche that our statements would do anything to make possible "increased dialogue" among the parties. With regard to consulting the other Friends, Boillon was slightly more hopeful than Loiseau that the Spanish might react favorably to our proposal. He claimed their position had evolved "positively" in the past few months, and we should "test" them.

¶18. (S) Comment: Loiseau understood perfectly that time was of the essence in terms of consulting further on possible statements to follow the rollover. The next step seems to be in New York, and we would encourage our colleagues at USUN to check that their French counterparts have received instructions to engage van Walsum and the Secretariat. We are ready here to follow up as required.

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